

Portsmouth City School Board's Safe Schools Committee



Final Report

Presented Thursday, June 23, 2011

The Portsmouth City School Board authorized the creation of the Safe Schools Committee in October 2010. The Committee was charged with the following:

1. Undertake a critical assessment of the school division's current safety and security policies, guidelines, and procedures
2. Review the school division's current safety and security protocol
3. Undertake a comprehensive review of the school division's safety and security resources, personnel, and equipment
4. To conduct forums as a means of discerning the public's concerns and issues regarding the safety and well-being of students and employees alike
5. Submit a formal summary assessment with specific recommendations to the School Board no later than Thursday, June 23, 2011

Since that time, the Safe Schools Committee has held five meetings and conducted four public forums to complete its charge properly. A Concerns and Recommendations Form has also been distributed to all schools in the division to help encourage further input from the community. This final report is broken down into four major categories:

1. Schools
2. Policies/Code of Student Conduct
3. Buses
4. Other/Miscellaneous

Each category will be listed below with specific recommendations to help improve the Safety of our Schools. This information was obtained from the members of the committee and from the input of concerned citizens throughout our city.

SCHOOLS

1. Increase use of pre-existing metal detectors in the high schools. Maximize the random schedule that they are maintained to allow for increased effectiveness.
2. Increase surveillance of the restrooms to minimize discipline and vandalism issues. Encourage use of volunteers (for example PTA, retired teachers and administrators, armed forces personnel) as able not to infringe on student's privacy.

3. Increase the periodic monitoring of all schools' exterior doors during school hours and especially in the morning/afternoon hours.
4. Encourage additional input from parents, grandparents and concerned citizens at each school. Consider establishing a safe school monitor program at each school, reporting directly to each building principal. Their goal would be to visually promote School Safety and assist with additional recommendations listed above.
5. Maximize use of personnel during class change. Encourage teachers and administrators to maintain a strong presence in the hallways to continue to minimize discipline issues during the day as needed.
6. Ensure all unsafe incidents are reported promptly to the proper personnel. Coordinate the investigation efforts in a timely manner with an emphasis on problem resolution and impartiality. Continue to emphasize the utilization of the pre-existing Operations Department hotline to expedite corrective actions.
7. Conduct additional safety classes with all walking students on their responsibilities in regards to the crosswalks. Continue to support and encourage our crossing guards in their important duties.

POLICIES

All existing policies in regards to School Safety were reviewed by the Committee. They were found to be comprehensive in nature and in full compliance with all existing local, state and federal laws. The one recommendation noted is as follows:

Create a new policy in regards to personal ethics and character development. This would focus on students and staff to promote ownership and personal responsibility for our schools.

The current code of student conduct was also reviewed at several meetings. It was found to be also very comprehensive in nature. The two recommendations noted are as follows:

1. Encourage greater participation and response from students and parents. Consider a promotion/contest tied to the recommendation about personal ethics listed above to increase the turn-in rate and decrease disciplinary issues.
2. Promote and encourage consistency in regards to the Code of Student Conduct. This includes enforcement at all levels with no impartiality shown at any time.

BUSES

1. Increase the use of video monitoring on school buses. Currently not all buses are equipped with this technology. Have them clearly marked and displayed so that students will know that discipline issues will be clearly seen and dealt with appropriately.
2. Increase the amount of bus monitors on routes that have known discipline issues. Ensure that this is applied to all high schools and middle schools as warranted. These individuals need to have disciplinary authority (for example teachers and/or staff members). This will help to deter future incidents and help to keep our employees safe. Reach out to the volunteer community already in place (for example PTA, retired teachers and administrators, armed forces personnel) for help in this critical area.
3. Solicit assistance from the local law enforcement community. Determine additional means with their valuable input to enhance safety on all buses.

OTHER/MISCELLANEOUS

1. Create and distribute a brochure on student safety. Encourage input from the students themselves as able. Use these brochures in the classrooms as a teaching moment on safety, personal ethics and individual responsibility.
2. Establish and maintain a Safe Schools Committee (with public forums) as a permanent part of the School Board's committees. Rotate members as a way of community outreach to all areas of our City.
3. Include students on all future committees. Their input would be invaluable and potentially have greater relevance in the future as final reports are presented.
4. Establish a safe schools hotline for 24/7 input from the community. There are lines currently in use based on input from the Operations Office, and this could simply be an extension of that use.
5. Continue to promote and utilize the Safe Schools Committee Concerns and Recommendations Form at all Schools and Administrative Buildings. Consider sending home to Parents/Guardians as a further means of Outreach and Awareness. Have forms available at all future School Board Meetings (work sessions and regular meetings). Ensure it remains on the Portsmouth Public Schools Website as well. Incorporate an electronic version that could be filled out and submitted online for easier community input.

The Safe Schools Committee would like to thank the Portsmouth City School Board for the opportunity to serve in this important capacity. All due diligence has been given to make this a learning moment and a vehicle for positive change in our Schools and our historic city as a whole.